

Challenges in Delivering Services: The Front-Line Hospitality and Tourism Employee Perspective

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Abstract

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Significant challenges are faced by front-line hospitality and tourism employees interacting with customers on a daily basis. These challenges and the ways they are dealt with form the focus of this thesis. As they interact, a range of incidents may arise from highly satisfactory encounters to service failures. It has been argued that in order to achieve satisfactory service encounters, employees need to feel in control, satisfied and motivated as well as being given appropriate assistance, information and training. Front-line employees in hospitality and tourism are focused on here due to the complex nature of the industry. It is commonly agreed that it is characterised by poor working conditions such as anti-social working hours, part-time and/or seasonal work, minimal on-the-job training and low levels of pay. These are all factors which may affect employee work satisfaction and motivation as well as recruitment and retention.

The thesis is comprised of four studies. In Study I, hospitality and tourism employee work motivation is analysed. Study II examines front-line hotel restaurant employees' experiences of service encounters. How the skills utilised by employees during these service encounters are acquired and developed is then explored in Study III. Study IV concludes by examining employee informal information sharing activities, which offer one way of developing these skills.

The thesis' findings paint a more positive picture of work and workers in hospitality and tourism than suggested in some of the earlier published research. This could be explained by the fact that the thesis utilises an employee perspective in its truest sense. The findings of the thesis show that employees are motivated (to large extent by factors that have been pointed out in earlier published work motivation research) and that they are active in the pursuit of developing skills necessary to create satisfactory service encounters. Another conclusion of the thesis' findings is that the interaction between workers and guests in the service encounter provides an important opportunity for workers to feel satisfied at work.

Keywords:

Front-line workers, tourism, hospitality, service encounter, critical incident techniques, work motivation and satisfaction.